

RESEARCHERS BEYOND ACADEMIA MENTORING PROGRAMME 2020-2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to facilitate the meeting of the mentor-mentee couples arranged within the 2020-2021 edition of the mentoring programme [REBECA](#) (REsearchers BEyond aCAademia).

This mentoring programme aims to team up early-stage researchers of any field of knowledge who are interested in their professional options beyond the traditional academic career, with highly skilled mentors working in professional environments outside of academia.

This handbook is meant to be a guide to help facilitate the sessions and not a booklet of instructions that should be followed strictly. Thus, mentoring couples are welcomed to use it as an inspiration for their meetings.

If you have any feedback, requests, concerns or recommendations you would like to share with us do not hesitate to contact us at Euraxess-spain@fecyt.es



2. DO'S AND DONT'S OF MENTORSHIP

- **Mentorship is a bidirectional relationship:** both parts must be committed and listen to each other and can learn in the process.
- **Mentorship is about sharing experiences, know-how and advising:** the mentee is not a pupil, but also a professional, and the mentor is not a head-hunter, although can provide support towards job search.
- **Mentorship is a guided self-understanding/self-awareness/self-knowledge path** where mentees analyse their strengths and weaknesses and achieve personal and professional growth. Mentors may guide and accompany mentees in this process, they are not professional career coaches nor psychotherapists.
- **Open and continued dialogue** within the couple is the main tool in mentorship.
- **REBECA aims at helping you open your career horizons** but it is not designed to find you a job.



3. MENTORS/MENTEES COMMITMENTS

- Confidentiality and respect towards each other's comments and time are cornerstones of mentoring.
- The programme kicks off with a webinar for mentors and another for mentees. They will be scheduled on two different dates and further exceptional alternatives can be provided so that we all share the same starting point. **See Section 8 for details.**
- Every couple will meet in person or virtually 6 times along 6 months (between January 2021 and July 2021). It is a responsibility of the mentee to approach the mentor to find the best time for both for each meeting.
- Mentees are strongly recommended to work on a personal career plan to make the most out of this mentoring programme. **See ANNEX 1.**
- Mentees are requested to fill in a simple form after each of the meetings to allow the organizers to follow-up on the meetings. **See section 11**
- Mentors and mentees will be asked to fill a satisfaction and evaluation survey at the end of the programme. Meanwhile, they may feel confident to contact the organizers at EURAXESS Spain to provide them with any feedback, suggestions or concerns.



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4. PAIRING PROCESS

REBECA aims at connecting early-stage researchers with STEM professionals working in a non-academic environment to open up their minds to the full range of professional possibilities after the PhD.

Sharing the same scientific background has not been as critical for the pairing process as the shared interests and attitude towards the professional and personal life of each mentor and mentee (based on CV and answers provided through registration).



5. SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR THE MEETINGS

Based on the nature and aim of REBECA, mentoring couples are suggested to address some or all of these topics during their meetings:

1. Professional career aspirations
2. What is “Moving Beyond Academia” about?
3. What are the key differences between the academic and non-academic sectors?
4. Branching out: beyond academia and industry
5. Key hard skills
6. Key soft skills
7. Deepen into some soft skills:
 - I. Gender considerations for STEM professionals
 - II. How to network
 - III. Conflict management
 - IV. Time management: life-work balance
 - V. Communication
8. Self-awareness: overqualification vs impostor syndrome
9. Career progression
10. What have we achieved? What comes next?

To make each session more profitable for both of you we suggest you do some previous thinking, try to analyse some concrete and predefined questions during the session and pursue a predefined, measurable and reachable goal. Both the personal career plan suggested (see [annexe 1](#)) and the mandatory post-meeting forms ([see section 11](#)) are designed to facilitate this process.



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You might not be an expert in some of the suggested topics, yet it will be a healthy and useful exercise to discuss them. If you want to learn more about any of the topics, you could maybe contact more experienced colleagues, friends, etc.



6. GENERAL TIPS FOR THE MENTORING MEETINGS

- Meetings are proposed to be once a month. If once a month is not possible, other approaches suiting both members of the couple best will be equally fine.
- In order to optimize time investment in REBECA, we would recommend to set up a calendar for the 6 regular meetings from the beginning (e.g. first Thursday of the month) and try to stick to it. Afterwards, you can reschedule as needed under mutual agreement. In any case, **it will be the responsibility of the mentee to contact the mentor and confirm every meeting.**
- Take some time to build up a space of trust and connection among the two of you: introduce yourself to each other, agree on some basic items that will define your mentoring relationship. Try to answer the following questions as guidance in this step:
 - In what ways do you believe your experience and knowledge could be beneficial for each other?
 - Can you think in each other's (mentor/mentee) mind-sets?
 - What are your expectations of each other's (mentee/mentor)?
 - What is the best way you can communicate your concerns/suggestions to each other?



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- Do some preparatory work for each meeting like some reading around the topic to address or compiling personal experiences about situations, attitudes and behaviours related to the topic to be addressed. Some ideas about what to think about before each session are provided below, together with the suggestions for content for some of the meetings.
- In order to make meetings more productive, you can also share in advance items and documents to address in the next mentoring session.
- In order to make the most of this experience, experts suggest keeping some tracking of each meeting that takes place: recalling key points discussed and agreed or disagreed can be very useful after a few sessions. This can be done through the preparation and updating of a personal career plan, as well as using the post-meeting forms.
- To share experiences, articulate conversation around:
 - Stories of your professional life (your own, or from colleagues and relatives).
 - Specific situations: how did you face them, what could you have done differently, etc.
 - Self-awareness: see yourself as others view you.
 - Skill-Building: review skills you had or needed at that moment. How did you develop them? How were they useful?



7. ADDITIONAL TRAINING FOR MENTORS

Mentors will be summoned in February 2021 for one initial online training offered two possible dates and times to facilitate participation. The objective of this training will be to explain the basics of mentorship and of this programme in particular. **It is compulsory to join this webinar.**

Mentors will be invited to share their experiences throughout the programme with the other mentors through an online meeting in the middle of the programme. This meeting (or meetings, if mentors are willing to participate in more than one) will be useful to exchange both successful and unsuccessful practices and to advice and support each other. **Participation is voluntary.**

Mentors will be invited to share their professional experiences with other mentees (not only the one they have been assigned to) through online meetings. Thematic meetings (i.e. biotech SMEs) will be proposed and organized if there is sufficient interest. **Participation is voluntary.**



8. ADDITIONAL TRAINING FOR MENTEES

Mentees will be summoned in February 2021 for one initial training offered in two possible dates and times to facilitate participation. The objective of this training will be to explain the basics of mentorship and this programme in particular. **It is compulsory to join this webinar.**

Mentees will be invited to share their experiences throughout the programme with the other mentees through online meetings. This meeting (or meetings if mentees are willing to participate in more than one) will be useful to exchange both successful and unsuccessful practices and to advise and support each other.

Mentees will receive two online sessions that will tackle how to face the search of a job outside academia and how to write a CV for a non-academic job.



9. CONSIDER WORKING ON A PERSONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Participating in a mentoring programme is expected to be a great opportunity, particularly for the mentees. To make the most out of this experience we suggest you work in defining a personal career plan at the beginning of the process and use it to guide the meetings with your mentors.

This plan can be the map that should take you to the goal you want to reach: you will need to define where you want to go, what you need to get there, and how you are going to do it. We share with you a template which is aligned with the first topic so you could address it at the beginning of the mentoring period (professional career aspirations). We suggest the mentees fill in this template and update the file along with the following meetings as needed.

This is not mandatory, but we think that this is a good way to summarise findings and save all the useful feedback you get from your mentor. **See Annex I** for more information about how to write a Career Development Plan.



10. WHAT TO DO IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF UNSUCCESSFUL PAIRING

All the participants in this programme have been carefully selected by their willingness to participate, their sensitivity towards the goal of the programme and their CV. We expect all mentoring relationships to be successful and gratifying. However, mentoring relies very much on a good connection between two people and we expect different degrees of satisfaction in the programme that we will consider normal and that we will analyse to see how to improve. However, if by any reason, any mentor or mentee feels uncomfortable or uneasy with their partner in a way that exceeds these different levels of connection, we ask you to get in touch with us immediately at Euraxess-spain@fecyt.es so we can decide together on how to proceed

11. FECYT'S SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS

We will stay close to the couples throughout the process to inform you about upcoming online meetings, to check how you are doing with the sessions, see if you need any logistic support, etc.

We have set 6 post-meeting forms **which mentees are requested to fill in:**

- Meeting 1:
- Meeting 2:

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- Meeting 3:
- Meeting 4:
- Meeting 5:
- Meeting 6:

Please note that these forms are meant to help us check that the meetings are taking place and to identify possible improvements. No details from the meeting itself are requested as these are highly confidential.

Please remember that if either a mentee or a mentor has any kind of issue in the matching, you may contact us directly ([see section 10 above](#)).



12. SUGGESTED SESSIONS CONTENT

In this section, we try to help you with some guidelines on how to approach each session. We have structured it in different sections: previous thinking, goal of the session and some topics to discuss during the session and further readings.

1. Professional career aspirations

Previous thinking:

- Why did you enrol your degree/PhD? Did you get what you expected? Is it what you still want?
- Why and when did you take those critical decisions that changed/set up your career aspirations?

Goal:

- Define possible professional aspirations and discuss what you may need to get there and how to do it.



Some topics to deal with during the session:

- What is your work history? What organization are you currently working for?
- What do you enjoy the best/least about your work?
- What are you currently working on (professionally, personally, developmentally)?
- How did you get to where you are now? What types of obstacles did you have to overcome?
- Was there a time you messed up and felt like you'd failed? How did you bounce back?
- Think back to five years ago. Did you envision your career as it is today?
- What is your dream job?
- Where do you want your career to go over the next three years?
- How can we weigh in different career path options to help make the correct decision?
- This topic has been especially relevant to you? Who else can you talk/what information can you check to look into it?

Further reading:

- **The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less** by Barry Schwartz
- **Letters to a Young Scientist** by Edward O. Wilson



2. What is “Moving Beyond Academia” about?

Previous thinking:

- What are/were your expectations and fears when considering moving beyond academia?
- Check “Career development EURAXESS section”: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/discover-careers-beyond-academia/>
- Check EURAXESS “What am I most qualified for?” questionnaire: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/discover-careers-beyond-academia/occupations-competency>
- Check some success stories: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/euraxess-uk-career-development-centre/euraxind/euraxind-career-stories>

Goal:

- Identify the pros & cons of moving beyond academia

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- I'm considering a career transition. What are the options beyond academia?
- What are some other areas of the business that might be a good fit for me?
- What were the biggest obstacles you (the mentor) faced at my point in your career and how did you overcome them?



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- What do you wish you (the mentor) had known before moving beyond academia?
- How should I prepare for the next career stage?
- This topic has been especially relevant to you. Who else can you talk to/what information can you check to look into it?

Further reading:

- Vitae's Researchers Career Stories: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/researcher-career-stories>
- "So What Are You Going to Do with That?": Finding Careers Outside Academia by Susan Basalla and Maggie Debelius

3. What are the key differences between the academic and non-academic sectors?

Previous thinking:

- What is your current opinion about the differences between working in academia and working in non-academic sectors?



- Which of these differences do you value the most – positively and negatively - when considering a career change?

Goal:

- Identify the key differences between academic and non-academic sector in six crucial areas: responsibilities, collaboration, flexibility, workplace culture, individual impact and salary.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- How would you feel working on research topics that are largely chosen to meet the corporation goals?
- How would you feel working towards positive and immediate results rather than conducting self-directed research?
- How do you feel about high levels of competition in academia and the often-declared state of “publish-or-perish”?
- How well do you perform in teamwork?
- How good are your time-management skills? Do you have a structured working schedule?
- Do you think research should be performed for the sake of learning or in the search for immediate impact?
- Do you perform well with tight deadlines?



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- Do you see yourself teaching courses and mentoring students?
- Is it important for you to receive recognition at work?
- Do you know the earning average difference between working in academia and industry? Is this a limiting factor for you?

Further reading:

- **Mythbusting for academics: Considering a job in biotech/pharma:**
<https://www.sciencemag.org/features/2010/04/mythbusting-academics-considering-job-biotechpharma>
- **Ten Simple Rules for Choosing between Industry and Academia:**
<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1000388>



4. Branching out: beyond academia and industry

Previous thinking:

- List 6 career paths outside academia
- Check and compare your previous answer with:
 - What do researchers do next: http://bit.ly/researchers_next_20-21
 - Opportunities for life scientists and engineers: http://bit.ly/life-science-opport_20-21
 - Opportunities for social scientists and humanities researchers: http://bit.ly/social-science-opport_20-21

Goal:

- Familiarise yourself with the most and less common researcher career paths.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- Are you considering self-employment as a career option?
- Are you aware of the different non-academic positions that you can have in higher education institutions?
- Do any of these positions have what you are lacking in your current one?



- Do you know the scope of these alternative careers?

Further reading:

- How business-savvy scientists can find success in the risky start-up world:
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00523-0>
- Trading the Pipette for the Pen: Transitioning from Science to Science Writing:
<https://www.theopennotebook.com/2015/06/16/from-science-to-science-writing/>
- Breaking into the NGO Bubble: <https://community.chronicle.com/news/1822-breaking-into-the-ngo-bubble>
- How to write a policy briefing: <https://post.parliament.uk/how-to-write-a-policy-briefing/>

5. Key hard skills

Previous thinking:

- What is the difference between hard and soft skills for researchers? Check your answer with
http://bit.ly/hard_vs_soft_20-21
- What are in your opinion the key hard skills obtained in academia and needed beyond academia?



- Check and compare your previous answer with *Key hard skills for researchers*:

http://bit.ly/hard_skills_20-21

Goal:

- Identify 5 hard skills that are needed to transition from academia to industry.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- What could you bring to other sectors?
- What applicable skills and experience do you have?

Further reading:

- Key hard skills for researchers & resources to learn/improve them:

http://bit.ly/key_hard_skills_20-21

6. Key soft skills

Previous thinking:



- What are in your opinion key soft skills developed in academia and needed beyond academia?
- Check and compare your previous answer with:
 - The Vitae Researcher Development Framework:

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>
 - Check EURAXIND surveys to researchers and researcher's employers about most valued skills: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/euraxess-uk-career-development-centre/euraxind/euraxind-survey>
 - Check Vitae Researchers' skills and competencies:

<https://ashpit.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/vitae-researchers-skills.pdf>
 - Check EURAXESS "What do you want to be?" tool:

<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/discover-careers-beyond-academia/competencies-occupation-and-sectors>

Goal:

- Identify 6 key soft skills: 2 you are good at, 2 you could improve, and 2 you need to start working on.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

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- What do you consider are your strengths? Do your colleagues agree?
- What would be your blind spots and how can you improve?
- What new skills do you need to move ahead?
- How do you plan to continue developing your professional skills and knowledge?
- Do you have a template that you use for long-range visioning and strategic planning?
- What skills do you think you could work on to help you with your career aspirations?
- This topic has been especially relevant to you. Who else can you talk to/what information can you check to look into it?

7. Deepen into some of these soft skills

Previous thinking:

- Think out of the box: maybe you never considered these skills important or useful. Try to discuss them.

EURAXESS Researchers in Motion <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>



Goal:

- Open your mind to a new set of skills that you may have not considered before. (Try with these or others)

Soft skills suggested:

- Gender considerations for STEM professionals.
- How to network.
- Conflict management.
- Time management.
- Communication

7.1 Gender considerations for STEM professionals

Previous thinking:

- Watch “Understanding unconscious bias” via:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE>
- Watch “Gendered innovations: Harnessing the Creative Power of Gender Analysis to Create New Knowledge” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sktr6vbW1P8>
- Watch “Understanding gender dimension for MSCA projects” video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq4eWo3ORfY>



- Have you faced any professional situations in which gender has had a clear influence?

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- _Gender dimension in research; gender balance in decision making, equal opportunities for men and women.
- Maternity and paternity leaves, are they a problem towards professional development?
- Gender-related barriers in STEM professions.
- Do you perceive any gender trends within your professional environment?
- Is gender an issue in any way in your professional life?
- Do you lead or participate in any activity within your organization aimed at supporting gender equality?
- This topic has been especially relevant to you. Who else can you talk/what information can you check to look into it?

Further reading:

- **The Future of STEM Depends on Diversity - Nicole Cabrera Salazar TEDx Talk:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v8aDo4dV3Q>
- **Historical comparison of gender inequality in scientific careers across countries and disciplines:** <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/9/4609>



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- **Women Not Welcome: A Study of Gender Inequality and Leadership in STEM:**

<https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=solesmalscap>

7.2 How to network

Previous thinking:

- Are you good at networking?
- Is it any different beyond academia?

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- What are some good avenues for academia-business networking?
- How can I stay connected to key influencers who do not work in the same office or geographical area?
- Are social and digital media any helpful?
- How many emails/calls are too much?
- How to behave at networking events?
- Where to network?
- Spontaneous self-introduction vs introduction through a shared contact
- Who are the people you need to align to within a new organization to succeed?



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- What is the best way to suggest/better communicate new ideas?

Further reading:

- How to network at conferences...without being awkward:

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/146726/file-205975508-pdf/How-To-Network-At-Conferences.pdf>

- Nature Careers. Events: <https://www.nature.com/naturecareers/events>

7.3 Conflict management

Previous thinking:

- Think of potential uneasy situations. Do you need/wish have had any special training about how to deal with them?

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- Was there ever a role you applied for and landed, but weren't 100% qualified to do?
- Have you ever had a difficult boss or colleague?
- How to deal with new responsibilities or minions?
- Re-energizing overloaded, unsatisfied or frustrated employees (or yourself)



Further reading:

- **How to Deal with Difficult People – Jay Johnson Tedx Talk:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kARkOdRHaj8>
- **Workplace conflicts: Classifications, causes and management strategies:**
<http://www.academicjournal.in/download/427/2-4-42-346.pdf>
- **Dealing with difficult people:**
https://www.londonleadershipacademy.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Dealing_with_difficult_people-LAL1.pdf

7.4 Time management: life-work balance

Previous thinking:

- Can you help to create your own balance or does your employer define it?
- How to better organise your working time.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- Personal /work-life balance
- How to avoid wasting time.
- Task prioritisation: a waste of time or a time saver.



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- How to find a balance between focusing on your current job and looking for promotions or preparing for new jobs.
- How to deal with extracurricular activities or additional formation?
- How can you get involved in different initiatives without seeming unfocused?

7.5 Communication

Previous thinking:

- Think about a situation where you have experienced miscommunication which has led to bad consequences
- How good are you at returning emails/messages?
- What do you think your body language reveals when speaking in public?
- Do you tend to make eye-contact with your audience when speaking in public?

Some topics to deal with during the session

- Active listening as a way to improve communication in the workplace
- Emotional intelligence & handling difficult conversations
- Public speaking & leadership
- Non-verbal communication & audience perception



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- How do you think good communication skills relate to the other above-discussed soft skills?



8. Self-awareness

Previous thinking:

- Over qualification vs impostor syndrome.
- How do you see yourself, how do others, how will they see you in a non-academic sector?

Goal:

- Set up your personal brand¹.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- What is that that makes you unique?
- What else can you bring to new employment?
- What is what you don't know your new employer to know about you?
- What is the achievement you are most proud of? Is it also important in your career?
- Is it possible to transform weaknesses into strengths? How?
- How to find a balance between focusing on the current job and looking for the next one?
- Is this mentoring experience encouraged/incentivized by your academic manager?

¹ Personal branding refers to the practice of marketing yourself and your career. A strong personal brand maximizes your appeal as a candidate for a new job, seeking a promotion or simply expanding your network of influence. Personal brands are visible in our online social media profiles, in the clothes we wear, on our resumes and in the way we speak.



- How can I get involved with extra projects, volunteer work or professional development without seeming unfocused to my supervisor?
- This topic has been especially relevant to you. Who else can you talk to/what information can you check to look into it?

Further reading:

- **Branding Pays: The Five-Step System to Reinvent Your Personal Brand** – Karen Kang
- **Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future** - Dorie Clarke
- **KNOWN: The handbook for building and unleashing your personal brand in the digital age** - Mark W. Schaefer

9. Career progression

Previous thinking:

- Promotion vs progression
- Career progression in academia: http://bit.ly/progression_academia_20-21
- Career progression in the industry sector: http://bit.ly/progression_industry_20-21

Goal:

- Understand what you can expect from a particular career path

EURAXESS Researchers in Motion <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>



Some topics to deal with during the session:

- Have you already completed a career development plan?
- Which do you want more now, career growth or a change of pace?
- How would you ask/apply for a promotion?
- How would you know when you are prepared for your next career move?
- What rewards and recognition matter most to you?
- What do you think determines a person's career progression?
- What do you think determines a person's career promotion?

Further reading:

- **The Essential Guide to Moving Up the Academic Career Ladder:**

<https://www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/the-essential-guide-to-moving-up-the-academic-career-ladder.pdf>

10. What have we achieved? What comes next?

Previous thinking:

EURAXESS Researchers in Motion <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>



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- What have you done during this programme? Have you joined the trainings & attend the meetings as programmed?
- Have you prepared the meetings? Have you taken notes of the meetings? Have you gone any further?

Goal:

- Think about all you have already done and what will be your future steps. Ideally, you will improve your personal career plan.

Some topics to deal with during the session:

- Have you filled and used REBECA's career development plan?
- Do you find it useful?
- Will you follow it?
- What else could you have done or can you still do to get the most out of this experience?
- Are you willing to accomplish your next personal career plan?
- **Science Careers: Individual Development Plan:** <https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>



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14. ANNEX 1. CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

The main goal of a career development plan is to help you reach your goals.

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Having a clear and defined career path will allow you to define what you need to do next and will keep you from being stuck in a rut.

To fill-in a career development plan, it is important that you first determine what is that you value the most and what you are looking for in terms of a career. When deciding your next career step, you also need to consider what you wish to make out of it: this goes beyond defining your purpose and passions and it should focus on deciding what type of job fits the kind of life you wish to have.

Lastly, a career development plan will allow you to know your strength and weaknesses inside out. You will then be able to decide and meaningful target and set a realistic plan to meet them.

Resources:

- **Personal Career Development Plan template:** http://bit.ly/Career_development_plan_20-21

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